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AUTHOR Salazar, John H.
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ABSTRACT

The process of self-identification by persons of Mexican and other Spanish ancestry and its relationship to reference group theory is discussed. The study examines the relationship patterns between such indepedent variables as age, sex, years of formal education, birthplace, birthplace of parents, and language spoken in the home with various forms of self-identity concepts. Three types of reference groups were used: (1) positive reference groups (the individual's cultural group guides his behavior), (2) negative reference group (the individual opposes or rejects his cultural group), and (3) aspirational reference group (the group into which the individual desires to be accepted). The sample consisted of 228 families from predesignated residential dwellings, blocks, and census tracts having moderately large concentrations of families of Mexican or other Spanish extraction (only 150 interviews were completed). The sample consisted of 48% males and 52% females. The findings indicated that 54% preferred "Mexican American" for purposes of designation in official Census Bureau forms; 43% of females preferred Mexican American for self-designation purposes; Mexican/Mexicano was preferred by the less educated, while the more educated preferred Mexican American; and foreign born persons preferred Mexican/Mexicano or Mexican American while native Americans chose Mexican American or Chicano. The study concentrated on West Texas; it was decided that a major weakness of this study was the rather small sample size which did not consider the self-designation patterns of other regions and localities. (NQ)

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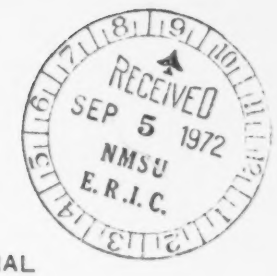

SELF-DESIGNATION PATTERNS OF A TRADITIONAL ETHNIC MINORITY IN A MODERN SOCIETY -- CONFLICT, CONSENSUS, AND CONFUSION IN THE IDENTITY CRISIS

Prepared by

John H. Salazar

Texas Tech University

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INTRODUCTION

The problem of minority classification of diverse racial and ethnic groups in a highly pluralistic society, such as the United States, continues to plague social scientists, governmental officials, and even the general public, at large. The unsettled and turbulent racial climate of this nation including increased demonstrations and other such militant activities by oppressed minorities to collectively organize and gain public recognition, bear strong witness to the ever-mounting struggle in the identity crisis.

This research relates specifically to the process of self-identification, along with concepts endorsed and underlying problems incurred by (1) the United States Bureau of Census, and (2) persons of Mexican and other Spanish ancestry. The Bureau--whose basic functions are population surveys, enumerations, tabulations, and projections for the United States--has struggled with the current issue at great lengths, dating back to the 1930 Census. The collection of accurate and complete statistical data which serve as bench marks or indices for purposes of formulating governmental policies and action programs are of vital importance to certain economically and socially underprivileged minorities, as well as to the well being of the entire society.

Although of very popular usage in both academic and minority circles, this paper purports the problems incurred and often the lack of common reference in operationalizing the concept of self-identity. From the author's knowledge or point of view, the most frequent approach to self-identity in a scientific interview or questionnaire reads as follows: "Persons of Mexican and other Spanish descent across the country refer to themselves as a group in many different ways. Select the way [specify the number of terms--vis., first choice, second choice, etc.] in which you prefer to be identified for purposes of ....." In this instance, with primary emphasis on Census surveys and other government programs, the above statement would read "for purposes of official government forms, documents, and surveys." This, then, would be followed by a listing of popular ethnic identity concepts arranged in alphabetical order--e.g., Brown, Central or South American, Chicano, Cuban, Cuban American, Hispano, Latin American, Mexican, Mexican American, Mexicano, Puerto Rican, Spanish, Spanish American, and other [print word in space provided]. This list mixes identity concepts and ethnic origin, while the Census Bureau mixes racial and ethnic terms in the same question.

Given the serious time limitation for this presentation, plus the complex magnitude and critical nature of the problem, major attention will be confined to discussion of primary

conceptual positions, along with general summarizing statements extracted from a 1971-72 field survey in the West Texas area. This research considers respondent expressions of interest and concern regarding the present ethnic group classification system employed by social scientists and government statisticians. This trend--which has been publically voiced by increasingly larger numbers of minority citizens, voluntary organizations, congressmen, and government agencies--continues to emphasize the need for more accurate and refined demographic data distinguishing between minority populations. Such an ethnic breakdown or classification would more effectively serve the specific needs of different ethnic groups and correct the currently existing lack of opportunity for those of Mexican or other Spanish descent to self-identify. This group of ten million or more citizens deserves equal treatment. Moreover, persons of Cuban, Puerto Rican, Spanish and Mexican descent frequently share the same qualifying criteria Spanish surname/Spanish speaking, while in reality in terms of language, customs, attitudes, values, needs, goals, and behavior, they may share very little.

Before turning attention to ethnic self-identity patterns and associated attitudes or feelings (i.e., pride, mortification, and confusion) resulting from the necessity to designate oneself as belonging to one specific ethnic group category, apart from and obviously different than the

general population, brief attention will be directed to a historical review and analysis of the Census Bureau classification.

THE CENSUS BUREAU AND THE PROBLEM OF ETHNIC CLASSIFICATION

Until recently, surveys of ethnic composition of the Spanish speaking population as belonging to other than the white racial category has been discouraged. Public sentiment, especially in the Southwestern United States, appears to have recently reversed itself on this issue.

To meet future needs in effective government programming, the U.S. Bureau of Census has undertaken a project to develop some system for identification and classification of the population, especially with regard to the population now under discussion. Along with some order of respondent preference for certain terms, vis-a-vis others, there has been some effort to discover avenues of resistance, such as negative attitudes toward the use of the word "race" in standard Census questionnaires. Such knowledge is most significant in order to ellicite maximum respondent cooperation and upgrade findings. This is especially important considering the mail out/mail back technique employed in the 1970 decennial Census survey.

By admission of one Bureau official, the racial classifications used by Census have in the main evolved in

response to matters of public policy, rather than as a result of the deliberations of advisory committees of racial experts or scientific surveys. One example is Article I, Section 2 of the Consitution which focused attention on the Negro population and separate counts for Negroes were obtained in the first census. The two-way black/white classification continued until 1860 when a "Chinese" category was added to the classification. In the 1860 Census, a category of Indian appeared for the first time--probably in response to their continuous threat to westward movement and settlement, plus the wording in the Constitution which read ".....excluding Indians, not taxed" designating Indians as elements of the population not to be enumerated. In 1910, the categories "Japanese", "Filipino", and "other races" were added to the list. Finally in 1930, the concept "Mexican" was introduced presumably in response to the large waves of immigration from Mexico in the 1920's. This designation in the United States Census had international repercussions and quickly drew criticism by Mexico which rejected the term "Mexican" as a racial category and reaffirmed the Mexican population as part of the white race.

The question of racial classifications, as proposed by Census, is not consistent for all ethnic groups. For example, by definition, persons of Japanese descent are always classified as Japanese, irregardless of the number of generations in the country, while persons born in Germany and whose parents were born in Germany are classified as German

but subsequent generations are enumerated among the general population. In the 1960 Census it was standard operational procedure for Census enumerators to classify the respondent by race without asking the question, except when there was uncertainty. At that time, such a practice received some public criticism.

Since 1930, public opinion involving racial questions have shifted emphasis from the study of immigration patterns to the field of race relations. As a part of this general trend, it has been suggested periodically that the question on race be removed from official surveys and other forms. A case in point, was the remark made in a recent population meeting by a very prominent academician. He suggested that the perpetuation of a racial distinction in scientific research was indicative of a popular belief in psuedo white superiority or supremacy. In addition, Grant Bogue presented a formal paper at the 1971 annual meeting of the Population Association of America, entitled "How to Get Along Without Race in Demographic Analysis."

Certainly, the racial and ethnic classification question is not an easy one to answer, neither for the Census Bureau or any agency involved in statistical research. More and more criticism, especially just prior to the 1970 decennial Census, has been leveled at the Bureau because of the absence of some ethnic category by which persons of Mexican and other Spanish descent could self-identify. The Census practice of

including those persons who marked "other" and indicated some Mexican or Spanish descent as part of the white population was also severely criticized by some.

Attention is now directed to self-identification as a process and it's relationship to reference group theory.

SELF IDENTIFICATION AND REFERENCE GROUP THEORY

Ethnic classification has many facets and breeds a wide range of attitudes and feelings--to mention only a few, contempt, anger, conflict, consensus and confusion. Such a process by its very nature has the affect of not only fragmenting the whole of society into distinct parts, but further separates persons of similar ethnic origin.

As stated previously, the full meaning of the concept is an issue open for debate, and one which was frequently posed by respondents in the field. Since the technique for ethnic self identification has already been introduced, the author will elaborate on his views, interpretations, and findings relative to this matter.

To facilitate a clearer understanding, the process of self-identification will be placed within an analytical framework of reference group theory incroporating three major types--positive reference group, negative reference group, and aspirational reference group. A positive reference group is defined as that ethnic group after which an individual patterns his beliefs, attitudes, and values, and therefore

guides his behavior, while a negative reference group represents that cultural group whose values and norms are opposed or rejected. An aspirational reference group is defined as that group into which an individual desires to be accepted as a member, but in which he does not presently belong, nor is he confident that he has the necessary qualifications for membership. Because he aspires to membership, he will make every effort to conform to the group values, customs and norms, including identity. A three-way general classification of respondents is observed in the field survey analyzed within the above terminology.

Self identification, endorsing reference group theory, plays a very crucial and dynamic role in the Chicano or La Raza movement currently underway throughout many sections of the Southwestern United States. Theoretically, such a process serves both manifest and latent functions, including the following: [1] inspires collective unity and a clearer ingroup identity, [2] stimulates self examination and determination to control one's own destiny, and [3] aids in the formation of a more positive self image, including attitudes such as dignity and pride ine one's ethnic heritage. This group approximates a state of internal consensus but often is in open conflict with the dominant system. Research indicates this to be characteristic of large numbers of Mexican American youth and fewer adults in the United States today. Members of this group are anxious to protect their cultural tradition and most often readily self-identify as Chicanos.

A second class or group of respondents included those who were highly suspicious of any survey relating to ethnic identity and more often were reluctant or openly refused to cooperate on the basis of intimidation or the fear that to divulge such information would only strengthen the position of the first group which they directly or indirectly opposed and therefore represented their negative reference group. The Anglo community may or may not have served as their positive reference group, but to some degree, at least, represented their aspirational reference group. Respondents in this class were most apt to identify as "white" or some other less politically charged concept--such as Mexican American, Latin American, Spanish American, etc. Most members of this group are in opposition to the Movement, at least in image, and openly rejected the identity term "Chicano."

Other respondents of this type displayed signs of discomfort or emotional stress resulting from the necessity to self-identify by one of the ethnic terms listed. Some indicated that by doing so it pledged their membership in and support of an ethnic group distinct from the general population. In most cases, they did not reject their ethnic heritage, but often preferred the designations of white, American, or American of Mexican or other Spanish origin. There is some speculation that the internal conflict viewed within certain individuals may have resulted from their possession of two separate sets of reference groups--one composed of family, old friends and persistent cultural traditions, and the other

consisting of new Anglo acquaintances and cultural patterns. In addition, this group typically did not favor the use of the concept "race" in Census questionnaires.

A third major class encountered in the field survey fell outside the range of either the other two types. These respondents, when viewing the list of self-identity terms and confronted with the necessity to make a selection, were those who appeared confused or undecided. This type was primarily composed of more traditional persons. They were familiar with many of the identity terms, but most readily responded to the concept "Mexicano". Persons in this group were predominantly concentrated in the extreme southwest or northwest El Paso areas, adjacent to the U.S.-Mexico border.

Although extremely difficult to accomplish a perfect fit for each respondent into one of the three categorical types, described above, such a classification serves to further demonstrate the complex nature of the problem and divergent attitudes toward this very sensitive issue. The above description results primarily from the in-depth research to follow, of the problem herein referred to as the crisis of self-identification in a dominantly Anglo, pluralistic society.

SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY

For purposes of this study, the dwelling, itself, served as the sampling unit. It is commonly acknowledged that persons in lower socioeconomic groups experience relatively

high geographic mobility, and for this reason, pre-designated residential dwellings, blocks, and census tracts having moderately large concentrations of families of Mexican or other Spanish extraction were sampled [see Figure 1].

[Figure 1 about here]

The geographical sampling units in this study were randomly drawn by block from U.S. Census tracts reportedly containing 75 per cent or more population of Spanish surname and from portions of the southwest, south, and southeast El Paso, Texas, and northeast Lubbock, Texas areas [commonly referred to as Guadalupe]. In each case, residents of dwellings located in the southwest corner or closest proximity thereof, were interviewed incorporating a semi-structured interview schedule printed in both Spanish and English.

Sampling units numbered 228, among which 150 interviews were completed and 78 were not completed because respondents did not qualify [non-Spanish], were not home, or declined the interview. The latter represents a 34 per cent non-response ratio.

Analysis of the sampling data indicates, among other things, the following population characteristics. Forty-eight [48] per cent of the sample were males, while 52 per cent were females. Eighty-one [81] per cent of the sample ranged in age from 15 to 50 years old. Fifty-eight [58] per cent of the population had five years or less of formal education, 28 per cent had 6 to 11 years, and 12 per cent had 12 to 16 years. Forty-nine [49] per cent of the sample were foreign

born, while 51 per cent were classified native born. Lastly, the analysis reveals that 85 per cent of the sample spoke some Spanish in the home, while 15 per cent spoke only English.

One major weakness of this study was the rather small sample size, which did not take into account self-designation patterns of other regions and localities throughout the Southwest and the United States, at large. Given the size of the sample and thus, the attrition of the variable scores, a very general analysis appeared to best serve the needs of this study.

SELECTED STATUS-RELATED VARIABLES AND SELF-DESIGNATION PATTERNS

This study, incorporating percentage tables, examines relationship patterns between such independent variables as age, sex, years of formal education, birthplace, birthplace of parents, and language currently spoken in the home, with various forms of self-identity concepts [the dependent variable]. The concept "white" has purposely been eliminated from the list of choices on the basis that this is the term currently used by the U.S. Census Bureau to designate persons of Mexican and other Spanish origin and there appears to be a popular trend toward a more complete, detailed ethnic and racial classification in Census surveys.

Attention is now directed to Tables 1 to 7 indicating the following findings. Table 1 shows that 54 per cent of

those interviewed preferred the concept of Mexican American for purposes of designation in official Census Bureau forms, 34 per cent chose Mexican/Mexicano, and 25 per cent selected Chicano.

[Table 1 about here]

On the basis of age, it was determined that 44 per cent of the sample in the age range 15-20 preferred the term Chicano, while those in the 31 to 40 and 41 to 50 year age brackets showed greater preference for the concept Mexican American. The selection of Mexican/Mexicano was more evenly distributed among all age groups (see Table 2).

[Table 2 about here]

Of the 78 females interviewed, 43 per cent selected Mexican American for self-designation purposes, while males selected somewhat evenly the three terms Chicano, Mexican/Mexicano, and Mexican American (see Table 3).

[Table 3 about here]

Table 4 suggests that those having lower levels of formal education and seemingly more traditional, prefer the reference concept Mexican/Mexicano, while those of higher levels of education prefer Mexican American. Preference for the term Chicano appears to be more evenly distributed among all levels.

[Table 4 about here]

Review of Table 5 indicated that foreign born persons identified most frequently with Mexican/Mexicano and Mexican American, and less frequently with the Movement identity concept Chicano. Native Americans of Mexican and other Spanish extraction identified most often with Mexican American and Chicano.

[Table 5 about here]

Table 6 reveals that those whose parents were both foreign born more readily designated Mexican/Mexicano and Mexican American. Those having one parent foreign born and one native born, and both native born more frequently identified with first, Mexican American and second, Chicano.

[Table 6 about here]

The last Table [see Table 7] shows that those currently speaking more English in the home related more to the concept Mexican American, while those speaking some Spanish and some English more often preferred Mexican American and Chicano. Those persons who spoke more Spanish preferred Mexican/Mexicano.

[Table 7 about here]

The data and findings revealed herein represent a pretest or initial phase of a more extensive study tentatively proposed by the U.S. Bureau of Census and is to be conducted at a later date. The current population surveys, the poverty surveys, and other such surveys may well provide the means--

larger samples--by which to periodically explore changing patterns of self-designation throughout the United States, both ethnically and racially.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The problem to which this study has been chiefly addressed evolves from felt needs for improved census types of racial and ethnic classification, expressed both in personal contact with and through letters of inquiry to the Bureau of Census, by a growing segment of the Spanish-speaking population of the United States. Based upon size and distribution of this significantly important and moderately diverse population, such concerns of a problematical nature should be processed through carefully controlled scientific research on a continual basis to determine changing patterns of ethnic identification over a period of time. For example, it is widely known that more persons and groups that have become active in "La Causa" tend to identify with the term Chicano, while others prefer another term, or even to identify by the traditional Census Bureau designation as "white" or Mexican or some other Spanish extraction. This complex issue is multidimensional, beyond the sociopolitical tone described above, and includes variations resulting from differences in ages, sexes, regions and localities, rural/urban residences, minority-dominant relations, levels of assimilation and acculturation, ethnic

lineages [mixtures of Mexican, Indian, Spanish, etc.], associational and organizational ties, and so on.

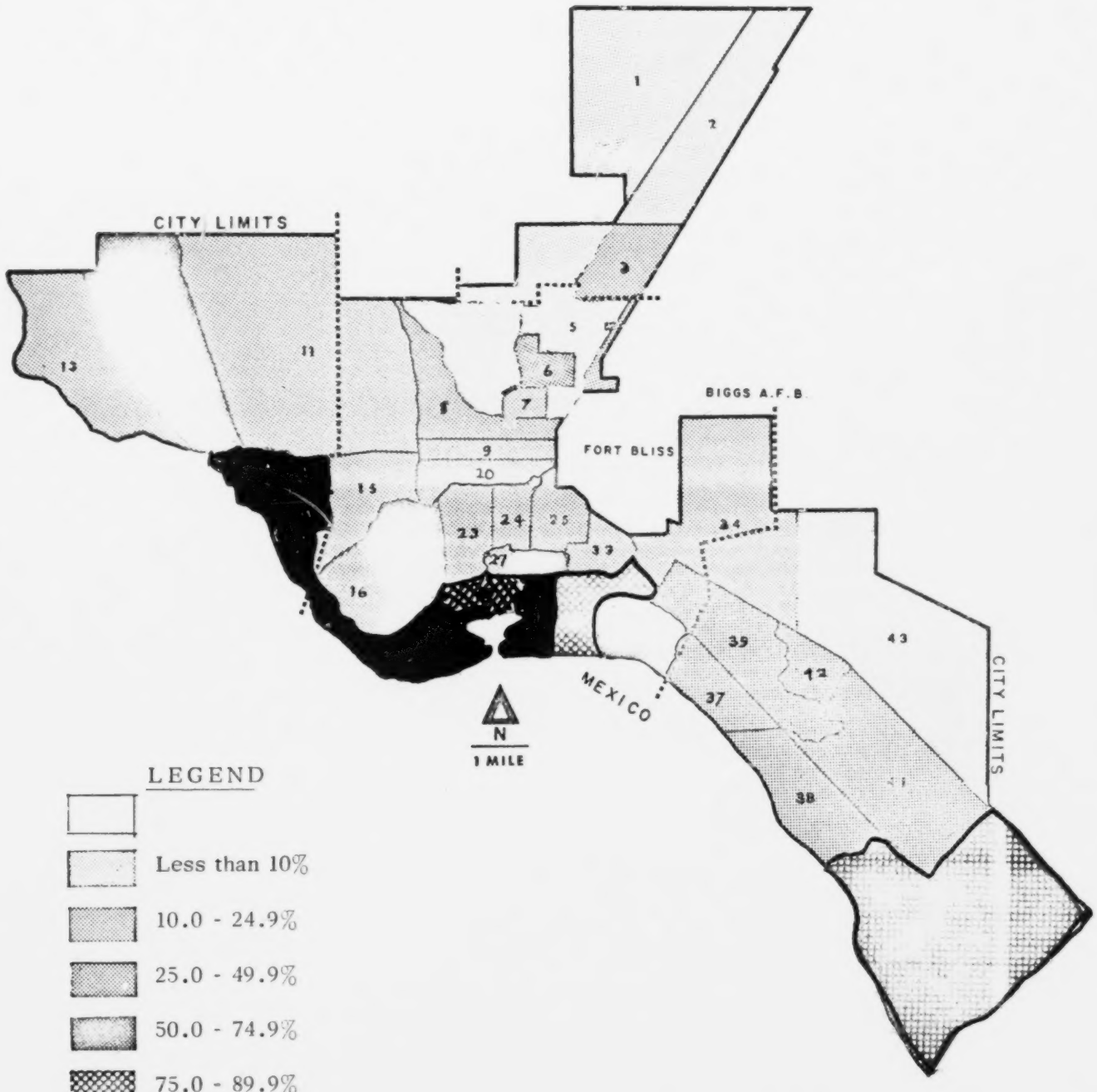
The second part of this two-fold study examines the emotional impact resulting from the process of self-identification. In this matter, the author proposed to measure along an inferiority-superiority scale, respondent attitudes--pride, mortification, and little or no feeling. If racial/ethnic data are operationally essential to government programs, such results serve as guidelines for expression and questionnaire design. At a more humanistic level, such research will provide the Bureau with a public awareness--in this instance, used synonymously with the expression "cultural awareness" so popularly voiced by growing numbers of Spanish-speaking citizens throughout the Southwest--and an outreach affect, otherwise unattainable in the traditional modus operandi.

The author recommends further exploration of the standard criteria presently employed by the Bureau for ethnic classification--i.e., Spanish surname, origin, place of birth, place of birth of parents and grandparents, mother tongue, and language currently spoken in the home. In order to provide equal opportunity for all to self-identify, nothing less than a <u>complete</u> [a 100% sample item on a national basis] and <u>improved</u> system for ethnic identification should be incorporated in Census Bureau surveys. This would

include a detailed breakdown or listing of ethnic categories, separated and apart from the racial designations.

This study further reinforces the complex nature of the problem, as described, and amplifies the need for a minimum three-way classification (or more)--i.e., Chicano, Mexican/Mexicano, and Mexican American--to provide adequately for diverse ethnic designations for persons of Mexican and other Spanish origin, excluding Cubans, Puerto Ricans, etc. Another category of Spanish American may be necessary to provide for the identification needs of a rather large faction of the Spanish surname population of New Mexico, California, and other states, outside the five Southwestern states.

Figure 1. PERCENT OF POPULATION WITH SPANISH SURNAME CENSUS TRACTS EL PASO, TEXAS



Source: 1960 U.S. Census

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING CITY OF EL PASO

TABLE 1. SELF-DESIGNATION PATTERNS OF PERSONS OF MEXICAN AND OTHER SPANISH ORIGIN

Self-Identity Concept	Number	Per Cent
Brown	2	1
Chicano	25	17
Latin American	8	5
Mexican/Mexicano	34	23
Mexican American	54	36
Spanish/Hispano	4	3
Spanish American	11	7
Other or Don't Know	12	8
Total	150	100

TABLE 2. SELF-DESIGNATION PATTERNS OF PERSONS OF MEXICAN AND OTHER SPANISH ORIGIN BY AGE

Self-Identity Concept	Age													
	15-20		21-30		31-40		41-50		51-60		61-70		70--	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Brown	1	6	1	2	0		0		0		0		0	
Chicano	7	44	9	19	3	8	3	15	2	25	1	8	0	
Latin American	1	6	4	9	1	3	1	5	0		0		1	14
Mexican/Mexicano	3	18	13	28	11	26	2	10	1	13	2	17	2	29
Mexican American	3	18	13	28	16	40	11	55	3	37	6	50	2	29
Spanish/Hispano	0		1	2	1	3	1	5	0		0		1	14
Spanish American	0		3	6	4	10	1	5	0		2	17	1	14
Other/Don't Know	1	6	3	6	4	10	1	5	2	25	1	8	0	
Total	16	100	47	100	40	100	20	100	8	100	12	100	7	100

TABLE 3. SELF-DESIGNATION PATTERNS OF PERSONS OF MEXICAN AND OTHER SPANISH ORIGIN BY SEX

Self-Identity Concept	Sex			
	Female		Male	
	N	%	N	%
Brown	0		2	3
Chicano	7	9	18	25
Latin American	3	4	5	7
Mexican/Mexicano	15	19	19	26
Mexican American	33	43	21	30
Spanish/Hispano	3	4	1	1
Spanish American	8	10	3	4
Other/Don't Know	9	11	3	4
Total	78	100	72	100

TABLE 4. SELF-DESIGNATION PATTERNS OF PERSONS OF MEXICAN AND OTHER SPANISH ORIGIN BY EDUCATION

Self-Identity Concept	Years of Formal Education in U.S.													
	0-3		4-5		6-8		9-11		12-14		15-16		16+	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Brown	0		1	3	1	3	0		0		0		0	
Chicano	5	13	10	21	6	20	1	8	2	29	3	27	1	33
Latin American	0		4	8	1	3	1	8	1	14	1	9	0	
Mexican/Mexicano	21	53	9	20	2	7	1	8	0		0		0	
Mexican American	10	25	14	29	17	57	7	60	2	29	3	27	1	34
Spanish/Hispano	0		1	3	1	3	0		1	14	1	9	0	
Spanish American	1	2	3	6	2	7	1	8	1	14	2	18	1	33
Other/Don't Know	3	7	5	10	0		1	8	0		1	9	0	
Total	40	100	47	100	30	100	12	100	7	100	11	100	3	100

TABLE 5. SELF-DESIGNATION PATTERNS OF PERSONS OF MEXICAN AND OTHER SPANISH ORIGIN BY BIRTHPLACE

Self-Identity Concept	Birthplace			
	Foreign		Native	
	N	%	N	%
Brown	0		2	3
Chicano	8	11	17	25
Latin American	3	4	5	6
Mexican/Mexicano	25	34	9	11
Mexican American	26	35	28	36
Spanish/Hispano	1	1	3	4
Spanish American	3	4	8	10
Other/Don't Know	8	11	4	5
Total	74	100	76	100

TABLE 6. SELF-DESIGNATION PATTERNS OF PERSONS OF MEXICAN AND OTHER SPANISH ORIGIN BY BIRTHPLACE OF PARENTS

Self-Identity Concept	Birth of Parents					
	Both Foreign Born		One Foreign Born, One Native Born		Both Native Born	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Brown	1	1	1	3	0	
Chicano	15	19	7	18	3	9
Latin American	5	7	2	5	1	3
Mexican/Mexicano	29	37	5	12	0	
Mexican American	19	25	15	37	20	63
Spanish/Hispano	0		2	5	2	6
Spanish American	1	1	6	15	4	13
Other/Don't Know	8	10	2	5	2	6
Total	78	100	40	100	32	100

TABLE 7. SELF-DESIGNATION PATTERNS OF PERSONS OF MEXICAN AND OTHER SPANISH ORIGIN BY LANGUAGE CURRENTLY SPOKEN IN THE HOME

Self-Identity Concept	Language									
	All Spanish		More Spanish		Both About Same		More English		All English	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Brown	0		2	5	0		0		0	
Chicano	5	17	9	23	6	25	4	10	1	5
Latin American	0		2	5	4	16	2	5	0	
Mexican/Mexicano	17	60	13	37	3	13	1	3	0	
Mexican American	3	10	9	23	7	30	25	66	10	45
Spanish/Hispano	0		0		1	4	1	3	2	9
Spanish American	1	6	2	5	2	8	3	8	3	14
Other/Don't Know	2	7	1	2	1	4	2	5	6	27
Total	28	100	38	100	24	100	38	100	22	100